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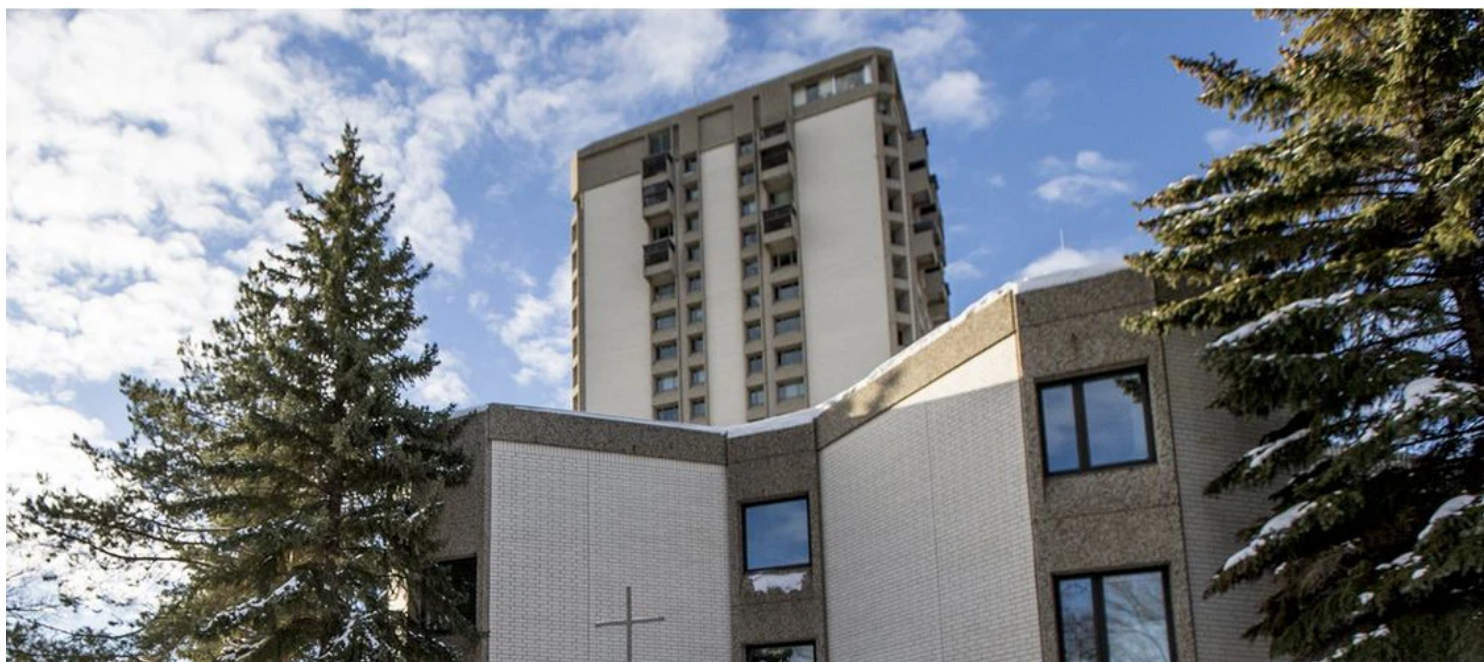
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Long-term care operator calls for mandatory staff testing in Sask.

Province reports cases in 29 long-term care facilities as of Friday, while cases at Saskatoon facility rise to 42, including 38 residents.

Phil Tank • Saskatoon StarPhoenix

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The Luther Special Care Home at the corner of Osler and Wiggins continues to add more cases in what is already the province's worst long-term care outbreak, up to 42 including 38 residents and four staff. Photo taken in Saskatoon, SK on Friday, November 27, 2020. PHOTO BY MATT SMITH /Saskatoon StarPhoenix

The operator of long-term care homes experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks is calling for mandatory weekly testing of staff.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Extendicare, which is dealing with outbreaks at long-term care homes in Regina and Moose Jaw, said in a statement sent to The Leader-Post on Friday that transmission from people without symptoms is a “major source of spread” in the homes.



“We can’t fight the virus if we don’t know where it is or who might be carrying it,” the statement said. “We have continued to press for asymptomatic testing, and strongly believe it is critical that we implement weekly testing of all staff.”

A page on the Saskatchewan government website started listing outbreaks at long-term care facilities this month as the coronavirus began its first major surge in such settings.

As of Friday afternoon, outbreaks at 29 long-term care facilities were listed from Nov. 12 to Wednesday, but the province did not appear to be updating the number of cases associated with each update.

“There is no time to waste — we must act now,” the Extendicare statement said. Mandatory weekly staff testing has been implemented in Ontario, it added.

The province announced two new rapid testing pilot projects on Friday, including one for long-term care facilities. Some facilities are set to take part in an antigen testing initiative with an Abbot Panbio unit that produces results in 15 minutes.

Antigen testing seeks to confirm the presence of antigens associated with COVID-19 in the respiratory tract and is often most effective before symptoms have developed. These tests are intended for use in repeated testing of individuals, but presumed positive tests would need to be confirmed by a laboratory test.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

The province failed to clarify which facilities will take part in the pilot project.

Meanwhile, Saskatchewan's worst outbreak in a long-term care home continues to add COVID-19 cases.

The number of active cases at Luther Special Care Home in Saskatoon has risen to 42, including 38 residents and four staff, according to information posted on the LutherCare Communities website.

The number of residents who have tested positive has risen by three since Monday. An outbreak at the 129-bed long-term care facility, located near Luther Tower in the Varsity View neighbourhood, was declared Nov. 20, when 28 cases were identified.

"Management and staff of Luther Special Care Home continue to work diligently to curb the spread of the virus in the home through extensive infection control protocols," a post on the LutherCare website says.

Visits to the facility are now limited to end of life reasons only.

Management at the facility has applied for a medical laboratory licence to acquire a testing device that will allow for testing people on site and getting results in 15 minutes.

While the number of staff who have tested positive has not grown, the number of them who are away from work is causing "concern," the post says. On Monday, 23 staff members were self-isolating, according to information provided by LutherCare.

LutherCare is working with the Saskatchewan Health Authority to find solutions to the staff shortage. Other long-term care homes have assisted by lending staff and helping to recruit and train new employees, the post says.

Some staff from Regina have relocated to help out.

There is also a single active case at Luther Riverside Terrace — a staffer at the independent living facility in the Buena Vista neighbourhood.

LutherCare employs about 600 people providing various levels of care to more than 1,200 residents and clients at locations throughout Saskatchewan.

— *With files from Arthur White-Crummey*

A sign declaring a COVID-19 hangs on the door at the Luther Special Care Home. Photo taken in Saskatoon, SK on Friday, November 27, 2020. PHOTO BY MATT SMITH /Saskatoon StarPhoenix

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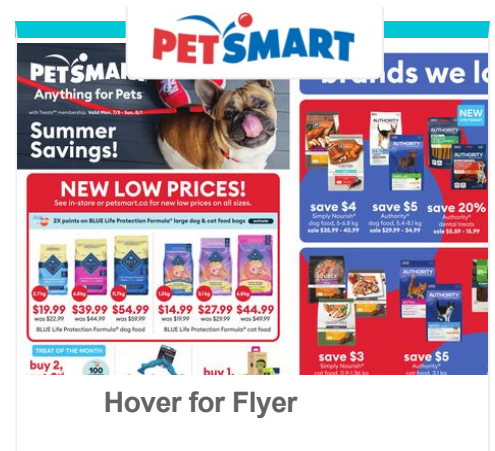
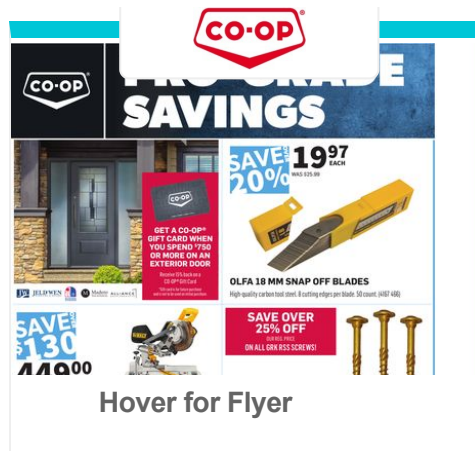
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